SPECIFICATION

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

          BE IT KNOWN THAT WE, Ichiro Hashimoto, a citizen
of Japan residing at Kanazawa, Japan, Koji Nozawa, a citizen
of Japan residing at Kanazawa, Japan and Yasuko Yamauchi, a
citizen of Japan residing at Kanazawa, Japan have invented
certain new and useful improvements in

        SERVER DEVICE AND RECORDING MEDIUM FOR SAME

of which the following is a specification : -

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

SERVER DEVICE AND RECORDING MEDIUM FOR SAME

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5   1.   Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to
a server device and recording medium for same, and
more particularly, to a server device and recording
medium that searches for product information via a
10   network such as the internet and displays inventory
information about that product.

2.   Description of Related Art

Japanese Laid-Open Patent Application No.
8-329143 teaches a system in which an order for an
15   item, such as a book or a compact disk (CD), is
received from a customer via the internet, the item
is shipped to a bookstore designated by the customer,
and the customer then goes to the designated
bookstore to pick up the ordered item. For the
20   convenience of the customer, this system provides
means for searching for the item and displays item
inventory information on a web site as a result of
that search.

Additionally, there is Japanese Laid-Open
25   Patent Application No. 10-91711. The technology
disclosed herein similarly involves expressing in
graphic form an inventory of a particular item at a
particular store and displaying that graphic at a
client's device.

30   However, the inventory information
displayed by the above-described prior art is
inventory information about the item in question for
one particular store (the intermediate or agent
store), not inventory information about the item for
35   every store that carries the item.

In other words, a disadvantage of the
conventional art is that it affords no way for the

customer to know the state of the inventory at
stores where the customer might be willing and able
to go to pick up the ordered item. Accordingly,
despite the fact that the ordered item might be in
5   stock at (for example) a store nearest the customer,
because the customer has placed the order with the
agent store he must wait for the agent store to ship
the item to the designated store. This waiting is
unnecessary and inefficient.
10   Additionally, a so-called shopping cart
model for making shopping on the internet efficient
is known. However, a disadvantage of the
conventional art is that a single method of taking
delivery and a single method of payment is specified
15   for all the items in the basket. Accordingly, the
conventional shopping cart model does not allow
customers to use different methods of taking
delivery and different methods of payment for
individual items in the cart.
20

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION
          Accordingly, it is a general object of the
present invention to provide an improved and useful
server device and recording medium for same, in
25   which the above-described disadvantages are
eliminated.
          Another object of the present invention is
to provide an improved and useful server device and
recording medium for same that provides inventory
30   information about the item for each store that
carries the item.
          Another object of the present invention is
to provide an improved and useful server device and
recording medium for same that provides item
35   inventory information for stores nearest the
customer's given address.
          Another object of the present invention is

to provide an improved and useful server device and
recording medium for same that provides inventory
information for every store in a form that is
convenient for the customer.

5   Another and further object of the present
invention is to provide an improved and useful
shopping cart model that allows the customer to
specify different methods of payment and/or
different methods of taking delivery for each item

10   of a plurality of items in a shopping cart.
         The above-described objects of the present
invention are achieved by a network-based server
device for managing product inventory information on
an individual-store basis, the server device

15   comprising:
         a receiving unit for receiving requests for
product information from a client device; and
         a processing unit for transmitting, to the
client device in response to the request for product

20   information, product inventory information on an
individual-store basis for stores selected on the
basis of client or customer identification
information.
         Additionally, the above-described objects

25   of the present invention are also achieved by a
computer-readable recording medium containing a
program for a network-based server device adapted to
employing a shopping cart model, the recording
medium comprising:

30   a management unit that manages information
on a plurality of items put into a shopping cart by
the customer; and
         a processing unit that transmits to a
client device a menu that allows the customer to

35   select from among a plurality of methods of taking
delivery and a plurality of methods of payment for
each item in the shopping cart in response to a

request from the client device to display contents
of the shopping cart.

Additionally, the above-described objects
of the present invention are also achieved by a
5   network-based client device that searches product
information from a server device, the client device
comprising:

a requesting unit that requests product
inventory information of the server device;
10   a receiving unit that receives the product
inventory information on an individual-store basis
from the server device; and

a display unit for displaying the inventory
information on an individual-store basis for stores
15   selected on the basis of client or customer
identification information.

According to these aspects of the invention,
an improved and useful service can be provided to
the customer.
20   Other objects, features and advantages of
the present invention will become more apparent from
the following detailed description when read in
conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

25   BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a diagram of the system
composition of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a diagram of the composition of a
merchant web site;
30   FIGS. 3A, 3B, 3C and 3D are diagrams
showing a member registration screen, an item
database screen, an inventory database screen and a
store database screen, respectively;

FIG. 4 is a diagram showing a sample book
35   title search screen;

FIG. 5 is a diagram showing a sample search
results screen;

FIG. 6 is a diagram showing a sample inventory information screen;

FIG. 7A is a diagram showing a second sample inventory information screen;

5   FIG. 7B is a diagram showing a third sample inventory information screen;

FIG. 8 is a web server operations flow chart;

10   FIG. 9 is a diagram showing a first store information selection and processing method;

FIG. 10 is a diagram showing a second store information selection and processing method;

FIG. 11 is a diagram showing a third store information selection and processing method;

15   FIG. 12 is a diagram showing sample contents of a shopping cartridge;

FIG. 13 is a web server operations flow chart; and

FIG. 14 shows a method for distributing a 20 recording medium on which the present invention is stored.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

A description will now be given of 25 embodiments of the present invention, with reference to the accompanying drawings. It should be noted that identical or corresponding elements in the embodiments are given identical or corresponding reference numbers in all drawings, with detailed 30 descriptions of such elements given once and thereafter omitted.

The term "item" used in this specification means tangible property that can be transported by one means or another, and includes but is not 35 limited to things that can be transported by hand such as books, CDs, digital versatile disks (DVDs), video tapes, everyday-use articles and sundries, as

well as things transportable by vehicle, such as
television sets, stereos, computers, furniture, and
so forth. For purposes of illustrative convenience
only, the following description uses books as the
5   item ordered.

Additionally, the term "access information"
used in this specification means information for the
purpose of accessing a store, and specifically means
the store address, telephone number, area map and
10   home page or URL, either singly or in combination.

Additionally, though the following
description uses the term "internet", in actuality
the present invention can be adapted to a wide range
of network services.

15   FIG. 1 is a diagram of the system
composition of the present invention. Using a
computer 110 the customer connects to the internet,
and accesses a variety of web sites using an
internet browser. The web server 120 provides a web
20   site (hereinafter also called a merchant web site)
for ordering items over the internet. At the
provided web site the customer can search item
information and obtain inventory information about
the items searched.

25   A plurality of store computers 130 are
installed at a plurality of stores and update item
inventory information in an inventory database of
the web server 120 via the internet 140. The
plurality of stores may be branch stores of a
30   corporation that operates the web server 120 and
thus within the same enterprise or they may be
different enterprises, in which case the corporation
and the enterprise are in a contractual relationship.
The updating of the inventory information may be
35   performed either in real time or by batch processing
overnight.

FIG. 2 is a diagram of the composition of a

merchant web site, and shows the composition of the
web server 120. A transceiver unit 210 receives
orders from customer computers 110 and inventory
information from store computers 130 and transmits
5   processed results from the processor 220. The
processor 220 is loaded by a common gate interface
program (cgi program). The processor 220 provides
sample pattern pages written in HTML (Hyper Text
Markup Language) to be provided at the merchant web
10 site (see FIGS. 3 through 7) and carries out a
variety of processes using a variety of databases
based on the customer's search request. For
convenience of explanation a description of these
processes will be deferred.
15   The major databases that the processor 220
chiefly accesses is a site database 225 that manages
the HTML pages, a customer database 230 that
provides customer information, an item database 240
that manages item information, an inventory database
20 250 that manages inventory information for each
store with respect to the items in the item database
240, and a store database 260 that manages
information for each store. It should be noted that
the site database 225 manages the sample pattern
25 HTML pages shown in FIGS. 3 through 7.
FIG. 3 is a diagram of a screen used for
member registration provided by the web server 120.
The information to be registered includes name 320,
contact information 330 and method of payment
30 information 340. When the customer clicks the
register button the above-described information is
sent to the web server 120. The web server 120 then
issues a member ID to the customer and records the
member ID together with the registration information
35 in the customer database 230. It should be noted
that the member ID can be converted into information
that identifies a client device, information that

for example is managed by a cookie. Additionally,
it should be noted that the contact information 330
is composed of respective home and work postal codes,
home address, telephone number and a so-called

5   "designated address". By clicking a check box 335
the customer can select either the home or work
address as the designated address. (In FIG. 3A, the
work address is checked.) The "designated address"
is the address of a place that is convenient for the

10   customer to go to retrieve an ordered item, and
either a home address, a business address or some
other address (not shown in the diagram) can be
selected. The customer can also change the selected
designated address.

15   The method of payment 340 is composed of
either a credit card number or a bank account or
both. The method of payment 340 may be left blank
if the user does not wish to provide the information.
Here, too, by clicking the check box the customer

20   can designate a "preferred method of payment". In
FIG. 3A, payment by credit card is selected as the
preferred method of payment. The customer can also
change the preferred method of payment, as will be
explained later with reference to FIG. 12.

25   FIG. 3B shows the contents of the item
database 240. The item database 240 is composed of
an ISBN (an item ID), a title (title of the book),
author's name, publisher and price. The contents of
the database change depending on the item to be

30   handled.
          FIG. 3C shows the contents of the inventory
database 250. A file is provided for each
individual store, with each file containing
information by ISBN and number of books in stock.

35   Updating the inventory database can be done either
in real time or by batch processing.
          FIG. 3D shows the contents of the store

database 260. The store database is composed of the
name of the store, access information (postal code,
address, telephone number and area map), store hours
of operation and the latitude and longitude of the
5   location of the store.

       FIG. 4 is a diagram showing a sample book
title search screen 410 which is displayed on the
customer computer 110. The search object 420
designates the search terms to be used in searching
10   the item database (author, title and publisher).
The search terms 30 designate the search words. The
logic conditions 440 specify the logic connectors
(AND, OR). The display number 450 designates the
number of search results to be displayed on one page.
15   When the search button 460 is clicked, the
designated conditions are sent to the web server 120
and the processor 220 searches the item database 240.
In FIG. 4, the customer is searching for books
authored by Watanabe Jun'ichi.

20   FIG. 5 is a diagram showing a sample search
results screen displayed at the customer's computer
110. The results shown in FIG. 5 are based on the
search conducted using the search terms designated
in FIG. 4. The lines drawn under the titles
25   indicate a hyperlink, that URL (not shown in the
diagram) being a link to a merchant web site and
including a corresponding ISBN (item ID).
Accordingly, when the customer clicks on the
hyperlink a request for more detailed information is
30   generated and the ISBN of the clicked title is
transmitted to the web server 120 as a result.

       FIG. 6 is a diagram showing a sample
inventory information screen displayed at the
customer's computer 110. As a result of the request
35   for details (shown in FIG. 5), the screen shows
inventory information for stores located near the
customer's designated address. The processes from

FIG. 5 through FIG. 6 will be explained later, with reference to FIG. 8. By checking the check box 610, the customer can place a hold on the item at that bookstore. (A "hold" is a promise to purchase the item, so the bookstore holds the book until the customer comes to pick it up several days later.)

The names of the stores (620) are underlined, showing a hyperlink to the store access information such that, for example, a file of an area map of the store's location can be displayed on the internet browser. Other access information includes the store address and/or telephone number, which is already shown in FIG. 6. Such access information is useful to the customer when the customer goes to pick up the ordered item at the store. Additionally, though not shown in the diagram, other access information can include use of a URL to a web site providing an area map address and telephone number for the store in question.

Additionally, the screen in FIG. 6 includes store operating hours for each store. Such store hour information is useful to the customer when the customer goes to pick up the ordered item at the bookstore. Further, the screen shown in FIG. 6 shows the inventory 650 at each store of the item ordered, that is, the number of copies of the ordered book in stock at each store location. Such store information is managed by the store database 260 described above.

In the example shown in FIG. 6, the information is sorted by store and displayed in order of store A, store B, store C and so forth. It should be noted that the screen shown in FIG. 6 can be configured to eliminate one or more of the check box 610, the access information (such as the hyperlink and the contact information 630) and the store hours 640. However, at least the store name

620 and the inventory (number of items in stock) 650 are required.

FIG. 7A shows a second sample inventory information screen. The distinctive feature of this
5   sample inventory information screen is that it is possible to distinguish between the stores in order of proximity to the customer's designated address by the addition of the mark 710. In this case, designating the store having the mark 710 makes
10 pick-up more convenient for the customer. Other aspects of the screen are the same as those shown in FIG. 6, so a detailed description thereof will be omitted.

FIG. 7B shows a third sample inventory
15 information screen. The distinctive feature of this screen is the sorting of stores in order of proximity to the customer's designated address. In this case, designating the first store listed makes pick-up more convenient for the customer. Other
20 aspects of the screen are the same as those shown in FIG. 6, so a detailed description thereof will be omitted.

FIG. 8 is a web server operations flow chart, showing how the web server 120 operates when
25 receiving a request for details about an item from a customer computer 110, in other words the operation of the server shown in FIGS. 5, 6, 7A and 7B.

In a step S810, the processor 220 determines whether or not a request for details
30 about an item has been received by the transceiver unit 210. Such a request may, for example, be generated by clicking on the book title hyperlink shown in FIG. 5 as described above, which causes the customer's internet browser to transmit the relevant
35 URL. Such a URL, as described above, includes the item ID of the relevant item.

In a step S820, the processor obtains

client identification information managed by the
client device cookie.

In a step S830, the processor 220 accesses
the customer database 230 and obtains the customer's
5   designated address from the client identification
information. If the customer has not yet registered
as a member then the process jumps to the membership
registration screen shown in FIG. 3.

In a step S840, the processor 220 accesses
10   the store database 260 and, using the relevant
designated address information, selects the stores
nearest the designated address and obtains
information about the stores (such as access
information 630, store hours 640, and so forth).
15   Thereafter, the processor 220 attaches marks 710 to
the stores nearest the designated address and sorts
the selected store information according to
proximity to the designated address. This process
of tagging and sorting the store information will be
20   explained later with reference to FIGS. 9, 10 and 11.

In a step S850, the processor 220, using
the item ID selected from the URL, accesses the
inventory database 250 and obtains inventory
information about the relevant item at the selected
25   stores.

In a step S860, the processor 220 puts the
selected store information and inventory information
in table form, attaches place hold check boxes 610
as appropriate, and sends the assembled information
30   to the customer computer 110.

As described above, the screens shown in
FIGS. 6, 7A and 7B are displayed at the customer's
computer 110.

It should be noted that, in place of the
35   step S820, it is possible to have the customer input
identifying information (such as member ID and
password) at the top page of the web site and then

allow the item search to be conducted once the
customer ID information has been verified.

FIGS. 9, 10 and 11 are diagrams showing
methods of selecting store information from the
5   appropriate database based on the customer's
designated address. Specifically, FIG. 9 is a
diagram showing a first store information selection
and processing method. FIG. 10 is a diagram showing
a second store information selection and processing
10   method. FIG. 11 is a diagram showing a third store
information selection and processing method.

In FIG. 9, the customer's designated
address is the postal code thereof (see FIG. 3). In
this case, the designated address information
15   selected in step S830 is the designated address
postal code 100-0020. The processor 220 then
selects stores having a postal code within a certain
range of the customer's postal code 100-0020 from
the store database.

20   The first three digits of the postal code
indicate the city and the last four digits of the
postal code indicate the ward within the city.
Accordingly, two stores having the same first three
digits in their postal codes are located in the same
25   city, and two stores sharing the same 7-digit postal
code are located within the same ward in the city.

Accordingly, the area of store selection is
based on the customer's postal code, and
specifically, a match of the store postal code and
30   the customer code, in order of resort, of (1) all
seven digits (indicating the store lies within the
same ward of the same city), (2) of the first three
digits of the postal code (indicating the store lies
within the same city), and (3) stores within a
35   certain range of the first three digits of the
customer's postal code.

The right side of FIG. 9 shows the postal

codes of the stores selected according to the
hierarchy described above. When, as in this case,
several stores satisfy criterion (2) described above,
the processor 220 then determines that those stores
5 with postal codes whose final four digits differ
least from the final four digits of the customer's
postal code are stores that are nearest the
customer's designated address. Accordingly, the
processor 220 can select by approximation those
10 stores that are nearest the designated address.

When the inventory information screen shown
in FIG. 6 is transmitted, the processor 220 sorts
the store names in the step S840. When the
inventory display screen shown in FIG. 7B is
15 transmitted, the processor 220 sorts the information
by postal code using the criteria described above.
(The right side of FIG. 9 shows a display sorted
according to these criteria.) When transmitting the
inventory information screen shown in Fig. 7A, the
20 processor 220 further sorts the information by
attaching the mark 710 described above to the first
three entries.

It should be noted that although the
foregoing description uses postal codes in order to
25 explain the operation of the present invention, in
actuality a special area code of one's own making or
an existing area code can be used in place of the
postal codes.

FIG. 10, in which the city portion of the
30 address designated by the customer is used, is a
table that defines the customer's designated address
and a proximal relation thereto, and is stored in
the site database 225. According to the diagram, in
this case wards T and M of the city of Yokohama are
35 designated as nearest locations to the city of
Kawasaki.

In this case, the processor 220 selects the

city and ward information of the customer's
designated address and refers to the table shown in
FIG. 10. The city and ward information of the
designated address selected in step S830 is
5   "Kawasaki-shi, Nakahara-ku". The processor 220
first accesses the store database 260 and searches
for stores having "Kawasaki-shi, Nakahara-ku" as the
store address. Next, the processor 220 then refers
to the table in FIG. 10, searches for locations
10   defined as locations nearest to Kawasaki, and
obtains "Yokohama-shi, T-ku" and "Yokohama-shi, M-
ku" as a result. In this manner, by a process of
approximation the processor 220 can select
information about stores near the designated address.
15   When the inventory information screen shown
in FIG. 6 is transmitted, the processor 220 sorts
the stores in a step S840. When transmitting the
inventory display screen shown in FIG. 7B, the
processor 220 sorts the data in order of proximity
20   to the customer's designated location using the
criteria described above. When transmitting the
inventory information screen shown in Fig. 7A, the
processor 220 further sorts the information by
attaching the mark 710 described above to the first
25   three entries.
        As noted above, FIG. 11 is a diagram
showing a third store information selection and
processing method. In FIG. 11, the entire
designated address has been converted into latitude
30   and longitude information and used as the customer's
designated address. The processor 220 accesses the
customer database 230 and obtains the entire
designated address. The processor 220 transfers the
designated address to a GPS (Global Positioning
35   System) and receives latitude and longitude
converted by the GPS. The processor 220 then
accesses the store database 260 and selects a store

or stores having latitude and longitude near the latitude and longitude of the customer's designated address. According to this method, it is possible to accurately select a store near the customer's
5 designated address.

When transmitting the inventory information screen shown in FIG. 6, the processor sorts the stores in the step S840.

When transmitting the inventory display
10 screen shown in FIG. 7B, the processor 220 sorts the data in order of proximity to the customer's designated address using the above-described criteria. When transmitting the inventory information screen shown in Fig. 7A, the processor
15 220 further sorts the information by attaching the mark 710 described above to the three entries shown.

In this example, the customer has designated store B as the store at which a hold is to be placed on the item ordered. In the inventory
20 information display screens shown in FIGS. 6, 7A and 7B, clicking the button 660 transfers the designated contents (that is, item ID and designated store information) to a shopping cart module. By repeating this process the customer can put a
25 plurality of items into his own shopping cart.

The customer can display the contents of the shopping cart on the computer 110 internet browser by making a request of the web server 120.

FIG. 12 is a diagram showing sample
30 contents of a shopping cart. The distinctive feature of this shopping cart is that the customer can designate different methods of pick-up and different methods of payment for individual items in the shopping cart.

35 The default for the "method of payment" is the method of payment specified and set by the customer when registering as a member (see FIG. 3).

FIG. 12 shows a bank account number as the method of
payment because the customer designated a bank
account as the preferred method of payment at
registration. The customer can easily change this
5   method of payment simply by choosing either "C.O.D."
or "credit card" from a drop down list.

Additionally, as described above,
information about the store designated to hold the
item ordered in FIG. 6 is also transferred to the
10   shopping cart module, so in FIG. 12 the "delivery
method" is given as a store hold at store B.
However, the method of taking delivery and/or the
store at which the ordered item is to be picked up
can be changed for each individual item. Other
15   possible pick-up alternatives include, for example,
"home delivery", which, when selected, places the
customer's designated address in the "hold placed at
store" column.

FIG. 13 is a web server operations flow
20   chart, showing the operation of the web server 120
when there is a request to display the contents of
the shopping cart. As a result of such a request,
the screen shown in FIG. 12 is displayed on the
internet browser.

25   In a step S1310, the transceiver unit 210
receives from the customer computer 110 a request to
display the contents of the shopping cart and relays
same to the processor 220.

In a step S1320, the processor 220 obtains
30   the customer ID. As described above, this client
identification information may be obtained from the
cookie, or it may be obtained using the member ID
input by the customer.

In a step S1330, the processor 220
35   references the shopping cart data using the customer
ID. The shopping cart data comprises, at least with
respect to the customer ID, item ID and individual

product ID, a pre-selected method of taking delivery
and store hold as well as a pre-selected method of
payment (if there is one).

   In a step S1340, if there is a preselected
5   method of taking delivery, store hold and method of
payment, then the processor 220 sets these
selections as the defaults. In this case, this
customer has already specified a method of taking
delivery (at the store), the store at which a hold
10 is placed on the item ordered (store B) (FIG. 6).
Additionally, the processor 220 refers to the
customer database 230, obtains a method of payment
designated by such customer as a preferred method of
payment (for example "bank account"; see FIG. 3),
15 and sets this customer designation as the default
selection.

   In a step S1350, the processor 220 sets
other possible methods of taking delivery and
payment options that the customer can use for each
20 item ID. As described above, the other delivery
options are "home delivery" and the other payment
options are "credit card" and "C.O.D.".

   In a step S1360, the processor 220 arranges
these items in tabular form and transfers them to
25 the transceiver 210. The transceiver 210 then
transmits the processing results to the customer's
computer 110. A screen like that shown in FIG. 12
is then displayed at the customer's internet browser.

   On the screen shown in FIG. 12, the
30 customer, as described above, can freely change both
method of payment and method of taking delivery for
each individual item in the cart. Then, by clicking
the OK button within the cart, the contents set as
shown at the screen in FIG. 12 are transmitted to
35 the web sever 120.

   The processor 220 then checks the method of
payment in the customer database 230 against the

method of payment specified at the screen shown in
FIG. 12 to determine if they match. If, for example,
at the screen shown in FIG. 12 the customer chooses
to designate "credit card" as the method of payment
5   when there is no credit card information contained
in the customer database 230 for this customer, then
the processor 220 determines that there is no match
and instead transmits a form to the customer for the
purpose of inputting the customer's credit card
10   information.

          If, on the other hand, "bank account" is
designated as the method of payment at the screen
shown in FIG. 12 and a check of the customer
database 230 reveals that bank account information
15   for this customer does exist in the customer
database, then the processor 220 determines that
there is a match and writes an order to an order
database not shown in the diagram. With the writing
of the order to the order database the ordering
20   process is completed.

          It should be noted that although the above
description assumes that the data for the items in
the customer's shopping cart (at least including the
item ID and the amount) are managed on the server
25   side, it is also possible to manage this data on the
client side. In that case, when a request is made
to display the contents of the shopping cart, the
customer computer 110 transmits this data to the web
server 120. The processor 220 references the item
30   database and obtains the information (such as book
title, price and author) needed for the display
shown in FIG. 12.

          Being able to specify different methods of
payment for each item in the shopping cart as
35   described above is convenient for the customer when
purchasing both expensive and inexpensive items at
the same time. In other words, the customer can

choose to pay for expensive items (such as, for example, an encyclopedia) by credit card and at the same time pay for inexpensive items (such as, for example, paperback novels) by cash.

5   Additionally, being able to specify different methods of taking delivery for each item in the shopping cart as described above is convenient for the customer when purchasing both easy-to-carry and bulky items at the same time.   In

10   other words, the customer can choose to pick up easy-to-carry items (such as paperback novels) at the nearest store and can arrange for home delivery of bulky items (such as a 20-volume set of encyclopedias)

15   FIG. 14 is a diagram illustrating a distribution method of the processor 220 (cgi program), and shows a method for distributing a recording medium on which the present invention is stored.

20   Reference numeral 1410 represents a recording medium (a hard disk) for storing the cgi program 220.   The hard disk 1410 stores the cgi program 220 and can provide same to the web server 120 via a network such as the internet 140.   The web

25   server 120 downloads the cgi program 220 and loads it into the memory unit for execution.   The execution is as described above.

Additionally, the cgi program 220 can also be stored on a portable recording medium 1420 such

30   as, for example, a CD-ROM, a DVD, an MO, and so on. The cgi program can then be distributed in the market via the portable recording medium 1420.   The purchaser can then execute the program by loading the recording medium 1420 into the memory.   The

35   execution is as described above.

It should be noted that the web server 120 can be located in a country other than the country

in which the computer 110 is located. In other
words, the web server 120 can provide the above-
described service worldwide from within Japan.
Accordingly, in this case, a computer used by a
5   resident of the United States can become the
customer computer 110 and can receive the above-
described service.

The above description is provided in order
to enable any person skilled in the art to make and
10   use the invention and sets forth the best mode
contemplated by the inventors of carrying out the
invention.

The present invention is not limited to the
specifically disclosed embodiments, and variations
15   and modifications may be made without departing from
the scope and spirit of the present invention.

The present application is based on
Japanese Priority Application No. 2000-211650, filed
on July 12, 2000, the contents of which are hereby
20   incorporated by reference.